

By: Luana Fabri

Baruch ata Adonai, Eloheinu Melech ha'olam, hamotzi lechem, min ha aretz." "Blessed are You, O LORD our God, King of the Universe, Who has brought forth bread from the earth."

At the beginning of the family meal, this blessing is said as the bread is broken. The blessing is referred to as "the breaking of bread".

Sharing meals is a very important part of Jewish family and community life. So important, that special blessings are said at the start and end of the meal. The term "breaking bread" is mentioned several times in the New Testament writings. It is important that we take a look at what it means in Jewish life, to "break bread".

The "breaking of bread" is something which is done only in the context of a meal. In fact, the Talmud (Jewish Oral Law), uses the term only in reference to the blessing at the start of the meal. The one who says the blessing over the bread is referred to as the one who "breaks bread". At every meal, it was, and is the custom to have bread and wine. The blessings over the bread and wine are said at the beginning of the meal. The one who recited the blessing, did so while literally breaking the bread. Following are some examples of this from the Talmud (the quotations are exact) :

Our Rabbis taught: A man should not break bread for visitors unless he eats with them, but he may break bread for his children and the members of his household so as to train them in the performance of religious duties. I.e., recite the blessing. Talmud - Mas. Rosh HaShana 29b

R. Abba said: On the Sabbath it is one's duty to break bread over two loaves... I.e., to recite the blessing. Talmud - Mas. Chullin 7b

It is related of R. Phinehas b. Jair that never in his life did he say grace over a piece of bread which was not his own; Lit., 'to break (bread)'. Talmud - Mas. Berachoth 39b

R. Abba said: On Sabbath one should break bread from two loaves. Lit. say blessing. Talmud - Mas. Berachoth 46a

So, in these few examples, we can see that the Jewish terminology "breaking bread", simply refers to the "blessing" at the start of the meal, or to the meal itself.

In the days of Yeshua, a 'communal meal' was a common practice, particularly among the Jewish Sect of the Essenes. The Essenes, a community living mostly in the Judean hills, were known for their absolute community of goods. Those who came into the Community, had to give all they had: there was one purse for all, and all members had expenses, clothing, and food in common. In the second chapter of the book of 'Acts', many of the believers in Messiah began to follow the Essene lifestyle, selling their belongings, having all things in common and breaking bread (sharing communal meals) from house to house: "And all believers were together and had all things in common; and those who had possessions sold them and divided to each man according to his need. And they went to the Temple every day with one accord; and at home they broke bread and received food with joy and a pure heart." 1

With the advent of Christianity in the fourth century CE, a "Communion" ritual was introduced as part of Christian worship. This ritual involved the reconstructing of the 'sacrifice of Christ', where the worshipers partook of bread and wine, which represented the body and blood of their god.

Now, within Judaism, there is no such concept as 'communion', nor has there ever been. There is no Biblical equivalent to 'Eucharist', or 'Communion ritual'. Actual, the 'communion' practice caused many severe problems for the Jews, particularly in medieval times with the strange charges of 'host desecration'. Jews were accused and executed, for allegedly profaning the communion wafer. It was imagined in Christian circles that the Jews, not content with crucifying Christ once, continued to renew the agonies of his suffering by stabbing, tormenting or burning the host. It was said that such was the intensity of their hatred, that when the host shed blood, emitted voices or took to flight, the Jews were not deterred.

The charge of host desecration was leveled against Jews over all the Christian world, frequently bringing large scale massacre.

So, if the concept of 'communion' has no Jewish root, where did the Church's ritual originate?

In the second century CE, the Roman Church officially rejected all Jewish custom and Law, stating that Christianity had nothing in common with the Jews. In order to accommodate pagans into the new Roman Empire religion, the practices and rituals of the Mystery Religions were modified to suit Christianity. Let us take a look at the origins of the "Communion Ritual" in the Mystery Religions of Babylon and Greece:

The Ritual of Communion was a ritual called 'Omophagia'. In the Greek mysteries, Dionysus (or Bacchus - his Babylonian counterpart), was one of the main deities. His birth was celebrated on December 25. He was the god of wine. His followers, called "Bacchants" , celebrated the communion ritual of Dionysus by crushing the fruit of the vine and drinking the scarlet lifeblood pressed from its flesh. They also dismembering the animal which represented Dionysus (the bull), and worshipers would tear the bull to pieces with their hands and teeth. By practicing "Omophagia" (the dismemberment of the sacrificial victim and eating the flesh and drinking the blood), it was believed the worshiper absorbed the nature, or life of the god into his own. Thus, having consumed the flesh of the bull and the wine representing Dionysus, the worshipers took on his power and character. This was a communion in the god's own body and blood - to become like the god, they had to consume the god.

The second century Church took this concept and adapted it to 'Jesus'. For this reason, the miracle of communion was that the symbols of 'Jesus', the bread and wine, were believed to literally become his flesh and blood. This is called "transubstantiation", and is a belief of Catholics to this day.

Although the Protestant Church rejected 'transubstantiation', they kept the communion ritual, declaring that in the bread and wine, the believer partakes spiritually in the flesh and blood of the god. There are three main doctrines of the Communion rite within Christianity:

1. The Roman Catholic Church teaches that the wafer and wine of the Sacrament become the actual flesh and blood of Christ (Transubstantiation).
2. The Lutheran Church teaches that the flesh and blood of Christ are consumed in and with the bread and wine. This doctrine is called Consubstantiation.

3. The Calvinists say that the bread and wine give those who partake of them a spiritual participation of the flesh and blood of Christ.

It has been a common practice of non-Catholic denominations to simply 'spiritualize' Catholic doctrines. However, the belief still remains, that by either literally or spiritually partaking in the body and blood of the 'god', the believer receives the very life of the god.

In the Jewish faith, there is no ritual where a worshiper literally eats a symbol of God in order to 'receive Him'. We are transformed only by the Ruach (Spirit of God) in the observance of the Commandments.

If this is the case, then what did Yeshua mean when he used the symbolism of bread and wine and flesh and blood in reference to himself? Let's begin by taking a look at Yeshua's words while partaking of his 'last' meal with his disciples, before he died:

"And he took bread and gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them and said, 'This is my body, which is given for your sake; this do in remembrance of me' Luke 22:19.

Most of us know, that at this time Yeshua was having a Passover Seder with his disciples. What piece of bread did he take, describing it as "my body"? He took the Afikomen; not just any piece of matzah, but the piece which was broken and hidden at the start of the Seder, and compared this to his body. This was UNLEAVENED bread, signifying the sinlessness of Messiah. It is only at the Passover Seder, held on the Eve of Nissan 14, that the Afikomen is eaten. The Torah clearly states that we are to remember our redemption by eating unleavened bread at the Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread. This is the only time at which we are commanded by God to do this. Yeshua is the unleavened bread. For this reason he said, "Do this (keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread/Passover) in remembrance of me."

Most often, at a 'Communion service', leavened bread is used. Leaven represents sin; Messiah is 'the sinless one'. It is the anti-messiah who is called the 'man of sin'.

When the term "breaking bread" is used in the New Testament writings, it is either in context of the Passover Seder, or the weekly community meal. We already addressed the "communal meal" in Acts 2, now let us take a look at the following passages:

In 1 Corinthians 10:14-22, there are two issues which Paul addresses:

1. The sanctity of the Passover as being a meal for 'the redeemed' (the Body).
2. The prohibition of partaking in 'pagan meals'.

It seems that the Corinthians were attending the Passover Seder and then attending the pagan festivals as well. Paul says it is an offense to God to mix the two. Verse 21: "You cannot drink the cup of our Lord and the cup of devils; you cannot be partakers of the table of our Lord and of the table of devils." This is a common problem among Gentile believers, and Jewish 'Messianics', even to this day. Many like to attend the Biblical Festivals, but also continue in the pagan ones as well. Paul stresses the importance of the "community" of God as being a "set apart" body: v17, "For just as the loaf of bread is one, so we are all one body; for we are all partakers of that one bread." There can be no mixture.

The whole of I Corinthians 5 is about the Passover Seder. Paul says that those deliberately engaged in sin are not to partake of the Passover. The Passover is the only Festival of HaShem where only the observant can attend. The Corinthians were allowing just anyone to attend and the 'leaven' (sin) among

them was not being removed. Paul stresses that those who continued in their sin were not to participate in the Seder. The Seder is to be celebrated without 'leaven' (sin) v7,8. It is Torah law that the 'body' is to be judged correctly. Paul says that we are not to keep non-believers out at all times, but only in the context of the Seder: verse 10, "I do not mean that you should separate completely from all the immoral people of the world..... verse 11 "but with such a person, you must not break bread."

Again in 1 Corinthians 11:26-31, Paul reinforces the Torah command that "no uncircumcised person may eat of the Passover". It seems that this command was not being taken seriously and non-observant people were partaking. For this reason, as the Torah also warns, they were dying or becoming sick. This is what the Torah calls the punishment of 'Kareth' - when God executes punishment on a person who violates the Commandment in a hidden manner.

Paul's letters are for the purpose of dealing with issues arising among the Gentile members of the Nazarene Jewish Community. The Gentiles had no understanding of the Torah and its requirements. Due to Corinthian 'lawlessness', many problems were being imported into the Jewish Community. Paul is instructing the Gentiles on how things should be done and how serious these matters are. Contrary to what the Corinthians were used to, the Passover Seder was not a 'love feast' where anyone could come along for a good time and a good feed.

The above passages bear no relevance to a "Communion service" The term "breaking of bread" is purely a reference to either the Passover Seder, or just having a meal. Any other ritual, is simply not "breaking bread" in the Jewish context.

Having said this, what was Yeshua referring to when he said, "Unless you eat my body and drink my blood you have not life within you?"

Yeshua's very words are found in Jewish Kabbalistic writings. Keeping in mind that Yeshua is the LIVING TORAH who came down from heaven, let us read the following excerpt in that context:

"... The Torah is clothed in the soul and intellect of a person, and is absorbed in them, and is called 'bread' and 'food' of the soul. For just as physical bread nourishes the body as it is absorbed internally, in his very inner self, where it is transformed into blood and flesh of his flesh, whereby he lives and exists - so too, it is with the knowledge of the Torah and its comprehension by the souls of the person who studies it well, with a concentration of his intellect, until the Torah is absorbed by his intellect and is united with it and they become one. This becomes nourishment for the soul, and its inner life from the Giver of Life, the blessed En Sof (the Eternal God). This is the meaning of the verse, 'Yea, Thy Torah is within my inward parts.'" 2

In John 6: 47-57 Yeshua said the following, referring to himself as Torah: (parenthesis mine)

"I am the living bread (Torah) that came down from heaven. If anyone eats this bread (Torah), he will live forever. This bread is my flesh (Yeshua is Torah in the flesh), which I will give for the life of the world.... v53: Yeshua said to them, 'I tell you the truth, unless you can eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood (Yeshua is fully consumed Torah), you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For my flesh (Torah) is real food and my blood (Torah) is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him. Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me (Torah) will live because of me."

Yeshua is the fullness of wisdom, knowledge and understanding. He is the full COMPREHENSION (fulfillment) of Torah. If we fully absorb Torah, so that it becomes to us as flesh and blood, we will have eternal life. As the Sages say, "The scrolls of the Torah may be destroyed, but its spirit is immortal and indestructible. 3 The Ruach will quicken the spirit of the Torah within the righteous dead, and they will be resurrected.

Rabbi Abraham Heschel says in 'God In Search of Man': "The goal is for man to be an incarnation of the Torah; for the Torah to be in man, in his soul and in his deeds."

We can see how important it is to understand the words of Yeshua and the writers of the New Testament from a totally Jewish perspective. If we do not do so, we will in fact give the wrong interpretation or abolish their words. On the other hand, by interpreting the New Testament writings in the context of Jewish thought, terminology and practice, we will interpret correctly, or fulfill the words of Messiah and his disciples.